

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE (1821-1867):

1. Art critic, poet, & alienated in a societal age of cultural changes unto modernity, the decline of Romanticism, & upward trend of Realism, agricultural & nobility caste to emergence of bourgeoisie (upper middle class) in urban, industrial, & technological setting. Part of the artistic & intellectual life in Paris, Baudelaire lived a life of debt, self-destruction, & unique sense of fashion (“dandy” or “hipster”).

2 Baudelaire offers reviews of the public exhibitions of the contemporary arts in Paris known as the Paris Salon Exhibitions (1667-1880). These public exhibitions of contemporary art, sourced from, organized, & controlled by French Academy, were held *regularly* from 1737-1880. Baudelaire critiques the academic art as becoming irrelevant for it focused on “heroes” of the ancient world instead of what is found in the present circumstances, namely, modern life.

3 Baudelaire’s Romanticism involves the following themes: (a) artistic freedom; (b) expressions of individuality; (c) personal feelings; (d) primacy of the imagination, he turns to educate the bourgeoisie to embrace the riches found in the “now” in modern life.

4 Thus, Baudelaire called artists to pain modern life. While modern art was in part a “revolt” against the “Salon system,” steeped in Neo-classicism, 19th century artists still had to participate in it given its influence & power, & resources.

Philosopher Monroe C. Beardsley notes that Baudelaire claimed that the “the idea of utility is ‘the most hostile in the world to the idea of beauty’ [Introduction to the *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires*, Oeuvres complètes, VII [1933], xiv]. He defended the the importance of pure art, free from moral limitations, and his flowers of evil symbolize beauty’s independence of, and superiority to, all other considerations. Yet he attacked ‘the childish utopianism of the art for art’s sake school, in ruling out morals’ (see *L’Art romantique* [1869], in *Oeuvres complètes*, II [1925], 184). But he seems to have meant here not so much that art is, in the final analysis, subject to the ordinary moral code, but that it has its own code of morality, to which it has an obligation to conform (see III, 284, 382).” [Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, 286]

SIGNIFICANT QUOTES FROM SALONS 1845, 1946:

Critiques of Critiques”

Salon of 1845, *A Few Words of Introduction (To the Bourgeois)*:

“We shall speak about everything that attracts the eye of the crowd and of the artists; our professional consciences obliges us to do so. Everything that pleases has a reason for pleasing, and to scorn the throngs of those that have gone astray is no way to being them back to where they ought to be.”

Salon of 1846, *To the Bourgeois*:

“You are the majority-in number and intelligence; therefore you are the force-which is justice. Some are scholars, others are owners; a glorious day will come when the scholars shall be owners and the owners scholars. Then your power will be complete, and no man will protest against it. Until that supreme harmony is achieved, it is just that those who are but owners should aspire to become scholars; for knowledge is no less of an enjoyment than ownership.”

“The government of the city is in your hands, and that is just, for you are the force. But you must also be capable of feeling beauty; for as not one of you today can do without power so not one of you has the right to do without poetry.”

“You can live three days without bread-without poetry, never; and those of you who can say the contrary are mistaken; they are out of their minds.”

“The aristocrats of thought, the distributors of praise and blame, the monopolists of the things of the mind, have told you that you have no right to feel and to enjoy-they are Pharisees.”

“Enjoyment is a science, and the exercise of the five senses calls for a particular initiation which only comes about through goodwill and need.”

”Very well, you need art. Art is an infinitely precious good, a draught both refreshing and cheering which restores the stomach and the mind to the natural equilibrium of the ideal. You understand its function, you gentlemen of the bourgeoisie-whether lawgivers or businessmen-when the seventh or the eighth hour strikes and you bend your tired head toward the embers of your hearth or the cushions of your armchair. That is the time when a keener desire and a more active reverie would refresh you after your daily labors.”

“But the monopolists have decided to keep the forbidden fruit of knowledge from you, because knowledge is their counter and their shop, and they are infinitely jealous of it. If they had merely denied you the power to create works of art or to understand the processes by which they are created, they would have asserted a truth at which you could not take offense, because public business and trade take up three quarters of your day. And as for your leisure hours, they should be used for enjoyment and pleasure. But the monopolists have forbidden you even to enjoy, because you do not understand the techniques of the arts, as you do those of the law and of business. And yet it is just that if two-third of your time are devoted to knowledge, then the remaining third should be occupied by feeling-and it is by feeling alone that art is to be understood, and it is in this way that the equilibrium of your soul’s forces will be established.

“You, the bourgeois-be you king, lawgiver, or businessman-have founded collections, museums, and galleries. Some of those, which sixteen years ago were only open to the monopolist, have thrown wide their doors to the multitude.”

On the Heroism of Modern life, Concluding remarks, Salon of 1845:

“No one is cocking his ear to tomorrow’s wind; and yet the heroism of *modern life* surrounds and presses upon us. We are quite sufficiently chocked by our true feelings for us to be able to recognize them. There is no lack of subjects, nor of colors, to make epics. The painter, the true painter for whom we are looking, will be he who can snatch its epic quality from the life of today and can make us see and understand, with brush or with pencil, how great and poetic we are in our cravats and our patent-leather boots. Next year let us hope that the true-seekers may grant us the extraordinary delight of celebrating the advent of *new!*”

On the Heroism of Modern Life: Salon of 1846:

“Many people will attribute the present decadence in painting to our decadence in behavior. This dogma of the studios, which has gained currency among the public, is a poor excuse of the artists. For they had a vested interest in ceaselessly depicting the past; it is an easier task, and one that could be turned to good account by the lazy.”

“It is true that the great tradition has been lost, and that the new one is not yet established. But what was this great tradition, if not a habitual, everyday idealization of ancient life a robust and martial form of life, a state of readiness on the part of each individual, which gave him a habit of gravity in his movements, and of majesty, or violence, in his attitudes? To this should be added a public splendor which found its reflection in private life. Ancient life was a great parade. It ministered above all to the pleasure of the eye, and this day-to-day paganism has marvelously served the arts.”

“Before trying to distinguish the epic side of modern life, and before brining examples to prove that our age is no less fertile in sublime themes than past ages, we may assert that since all centuries and all peoples have had their own form of beauty, so inevitably we have ours. That is in the order of all things.”

“All forms of beauty, like all possible phenomena, contain an element of the eternal and an element of the transitory-of the absolute and of the particular. Absolute and eternal beauty does not exist, or rather it is only on abstraction skimmed from the general surface of different beauties. The particular element in each manifestation comes from the emotions: and just as we have our own particular emotions, so we have our own beauty. [...]”

“But to return to our principle and essential problem, which is to discover whether we possess a specific beauty, intrinsic to our new emotions, I observe that the majority of artists who have attacked modern life have contended themselves with public and official subjects-with our victories and political heroism. Even so, they do it with an ill grace, and only because they are commissioned by the government which pays them. However there are private subjects which pays them. However there are private subjects which are very much more heroic than these.”

“The life of our city is rich in poetic and marvelous subjects. We are enveloped and steeped as though in an atmosphere of the marvelous; but we do not notice it.”

“The nude-that darling of the artists, that necessary element of success-is just as frequent and necessary today as it was in the life of the ancients; in bed, for example, or in the bath, or in the anatomy theatre. These themes and resources of painting are equally abundant and varied; but there is a new element-modern beauty.”

AESTHETIC PHILOSOPHY:

What is beauty?

1. Conventional dual aspects: general & particular beauty are bound together in one’s experience of beautiful art works (eg., body & dress) . He recognizes absolute beauty as abstractions from the general aspects of different beauties. Particular beauty is from the emotions.

2. Modern art is successful if it shows the beauty in the now. Aesthetic pleasure is not only found in what is grand but it in everyday living.

3. Artists depict contemporary life & which (because of time) will have historical value in museums.

4. *Ekphrasis*: The way contemporary art cultivates presence: thoughts are engendered in our mind while we are looking at the artwork.

5. He is interested in how reproductions determine the ways we see beauty in visual art.

6. Art of fashion is beautiful because it achieves presence. Only if modern art successfully shows the beauty of the present will it attract future viewers..

7. He enjoys minor art works because they are pictures not yet reproduced whereas a classical image can never achieve presence since its fame has transformed itself into a picture that is always readily seen.

Baudelaire’s definition of Romanticism:

““neither a choice of subjects nor exact truth, but a mode of feeling”-something found within rather than outside of the individual- ‘intimacy, spirituality, color, aspiration toward the infinite’” (H. H. Arnason, *History of Modern Art*, 5th ed., 2004, 55).

The slogan, “Art for Art’s Sake (*L’art pour l’art*)” was used first used by Benjamin Constant (February 10, 1804; though not published until 1895) within the cluster of philosophical ideas associated with Kantian aesthetics: (1) special autonomy given to art; (2) aesthetic object is something utterly different from all utilitarian objects (purposiveness is without purpose); (3) motive for its origins is the free play of imagination under the understanding’s general conditions of lawfulness; (4) The enjoyment of beauty and of the sublime brings to a person a value that nothing else can provide since it does not involve cognition or morality (Beardsley, *Aesthetics*, 286). For Kant, beauty is a perceptual form whose subjective finality is felt as a disinterested, universally communicable & necessary pleasure. Its finality assures us that it’s worth contemplating for its own sake, although it is only through feelings that this feature can be apprehended (*A Companion to Aesthetics*, 251). Thus, the doctrine of aestheticism, namely, that the art should be valued for itself alone to the exclusion of service (instrumentalism; utility) & *telos* (purpose; function) finds its origins in Kantian Aesthetics and the Romantic movement. **Questions:** (1) Does that mean nothing is truly beautiful if it useful? (2) What about works of art in ancient & medieval aesthetics that by and large were made for a particular use? (3) Do we have good justifications to believe art products have no other function that to be art products? (4) Should art for art’s sake be the sole criterion of evaluating art products? Does this value commit the fallacy of reductionism? (5) How does this value of art for art sake as sole criterion affect personal and social change in our communities? August 2020 ~ Dr. Paul R. Shockley, www.prshockley.org.